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Bernadette Devlin is Character Witness at Gun Conspiracy Trial

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Bernadette Devlin McAlinskey, the Irish nationalist leader and former

member of Parliament, was a star character witness for the defense Wednesday in the trial of five men accused of smuggling guns to the Irish Republican Army.

Mrs. McAlinskey, 33, testified she has been a friend of two of the defendants, George Harrison and Thomas Falvey, since the 1960s.

"I consider George and Tom to be the finest people living in the country," she said, adding that Harrison had "a respect for this country, its lawful institutions and its laws."

Harrison had opened the trial by "proudly" admitting he had been smuggling weapons to Ireland for 20 years.

The key defense witness, Earl Redick, stood firm Wednesday in his contention that the guns were supplied to the men by a man he identifies as an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency, George DeMeo.

The CIA denies any connection with DeMeo.

Assistant U.S. Attorney David V. Kirby spent most of the day attacking Redick's testimony. He suggested that rather than being linked to the CIA, DeMeo was an untrustworthy braggard.

But Redick, a friend of DeMeo for 28 years, refused to back down. He said he didn't question DeMeo's claims of connections to the agency.

DeMeo is serving a five-year prison term on a North Carolina gun conviction. As an informer, he helped the government build its gun-running case against Falvey, 64, Harrison, 67, Michael Flannery, 80, Patrick Mullin, 45, and Daniel Gormley, 33, all Americans living in the New York City area.

The defendants have admitted gathering machine guns and other heavy weapons for shipment to Ireland, but contend the CIA was behind the plan.

The trial has been on for a month.

Redick, 59, a gun dealer, testified that several years ago he built a silencer for a submachine gun for DeMeo after he was told "the company," a term for the CIA, had approved.

When the prosecutor asked if the device worked, Redick said DeMeo told him he had successfully tested it with members of "the company."

"Where was it tested?" Kirby asked.

"In Central Park," Redick responded to laughter in the courtroom.

"Didn't you think it odd that the CIA had no better place to test the weapon?" asked Kirby.

Redick said he did not and had not questioned DeMeo about the matter.